# WHAT IS THE JERSEY DEVIL?

By Paul Dale Roberts, Halo Paranormal Investigations

I once had an all-night layover in New Jersey and decided to head to the hotel bar to meet some of the other passengers from my flight.

That night, I met Randy Morrison from Philadelphia, who had previously lived in Trenton, New Jersey. To this day, Randy remains one of my Facebook friends, and we were both ultimately headed to Amsterdam.

During our conversation, I asked Randy about the Jersey Devil — also known as the Leeds Devil of the Pine Barrens. Randy shared an experience that has stayed with him.

He and his two older brothers had gone hiking in the Pine Barrens. At some point during their hike, they heard a loud, piercing scream — one Randy said he had never heard before. One of his brothers, who was about 50 yards ahead, claimed he saw what looked like a goat's head peeking out from behind a tree.

His brother immediately panicked and ran back toward Randy and their other brother. The three of them then ran all the way back to their car. Afterward, his brother described the head as strange and unnatural — not like a typical animal, but something more "devilish" in appearance. He was convinced he had seen the Jersey Devil.

Other witnesses over the years have described the Jersey Devil as a flying, bipedal creature with a goat-like head, hooves, and large, leathery wings.

### Comparing the Jersey Devil and the Chupacabra

Randy felt he had an explanation for what the Jersey Devil might be. He believes the creature could be related to the original Chupacabra reported in Puerto Rico — not the later sightings in places such as Texas, which are often attributed to coyotes with mange.

According to Randy, earlier accounts of the Chupacabra described a more unusual creature, sometimes said to have wings. He also pointed to historical reports of livestock killings in New Jersey — including incidents in the 19th century and early 20th century — as possible parallels.

However, this connection remains speculative. The Chupacabra legend first emerged in Puerto Rico in the 1990s, and its commonly reported appearance — often described as reptilian or alien-like, with large eyes and spines — differs significantly from traditional descriptions of the Jersey Devil. While there are some overlapping themes, such as livestock attacks in folklore, there is no confirmed link between the two.

There are both similarities and differences between the two cryptids. The Jersey Devil is typically described as having a goat-like head, wings, and hooves, while early reports of the Chupacabra describe a creature with large, oval-shaped eyes, minimal facial features, and either wings or spine-like protrusions along its back.

Size descriptions also vary. The Chupacabra is often reported to stand around 4 to 5 feet tall, while the Jersey Devil is described as ranging from 3 to 4 feet, with some accounts placing it as tall as 6 feet. These variations highlight how witness descriptions can shift over time and across regions.

### Folklore and Historical Roots

The origins of the Jersey Devil legend are most often traced to colonial-era folklore. One popular version tells of Mother Leeds, a woman who, according to legend, cursed her 13th child, which was then born as a creature that transformed and fled into the Pine Barrens. Some versions of the story claim the child's father was a demonic entity, though this detail varies depending on the retelling.

Historians suggest that the story may have evolved from

real events involving the Leeds family, who were involved in political and religious disputes in colonial New Jersey. The "devil" label may have originated as a form of public criticism or propaganda that later merged with local folklore.

There are also claims that the Lenape people, Indigenous to the region, believed in a spirit known as M'sing, a forest spirit often depicted as a deer-like creature. However, there is limited documented evidence directly connecting this figure to the modern Jersey Devil legend, and many of these associations appear to be later interpretations.

**Could Belief Shape the Legend?**

Some locals have suggested that stories of the Jersey Devil were passed down as a form of entertainment or cautionary tale, particularly for children. At the same time, firsthand accounts such as Randy's brother's experience continue to reinforce the idea, for some, that the creature could be real.

There are also more speculative interpretations. One idea sometimes discussed in paranormal circles is the concept of a "tulpa," or thoughtform — an entity believed to be created through focused belief or collective imagination.

Modern examples often cited include fictional characters such as Slender Man, which originated online but has since been reported in alleged encounters. Another frequently mentioned anecdote involves author Walter B. Gibson, creator of "The Shadow," whose acquaintances reportedly claimed to see a figure resembling the character. However, these claims are anecdotal and not supported by scientific evidence.

While the tulpa concept is not recognized in scientific fields, it reflects an ongoing question: Can shared belief influence how people perceive unexplained experiences?

**A Story That Refuses to Fade**

Whether viewed as folklore, misidentified wildlife, psychological interpretation, or something unexplained, the Jersey Devil remains one of the most persistent legends in American culture.

Stories such as Randy's — passed along through personal experience — continue to keep the legend alive, leaving open the question of whether the Jersey Devil is simply a story, or something more. ◆

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